



Institute of Health Visiting
Royal Society for Public Health
John Snow House
59 Mansell St
London
E1 8AN

To: Sarah Bourke,
HM Assistant Coroner for the coroner area of
Inner North London.

13 08 2026

Dear Sarah Bourke,

**Re: Institute of Health Visiting's response to Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths:
Inquest into the death of Aylina Akhmadova aged 17 days.**

The Institute of Health Visiting (iHV) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths issued following the inquest into the death of Aylina Akhmadova.

We fully recognise the profound tragedy of this young baby's death and express our sincere condolences to the family and acknowledge the seriousness of the concerns raised.

The Institute of Health Visiting is a professional body, charity and centre of excellence supporting health visiting practice across the UK. While we do not commission or provide statutory services, we work nationally to promote evidence-based policy and practice, workforce development, quality improvement and safeguarding practice.

We have carefully considered the concerns identified by the Coroner and set out below our response, including actions already undertaken and further measures planned to raise awareness of the concerns raised and support the prevention of similar deaths in the future.

Concern 1: *Primary care professionals such as GPs, health visitors and midwives spend the most one-to-one time with families. They will be aware which patients and/or carers need assistance from interpreters for medical appointments. In primary care, professionals often give safety netting advice regarding the circumstances in which a person may need to call paramedics. For safety netting advice to be effective, patients and carers also need to know that a 999 call should be made by someone who is with the patient and that interpreters are available to help the ambulance service triage the call.*

iHV Response: The Institute of Health Visiting (iHV) recognises and shares the Coroner's concern regarding the accessibility and effectiveness of safety-netting advice provided to families who require interpreter support. Health visitors are often among the professionals who have the most frequent contact with parents and carers during pregnancy and the early years of a child's life – with a remit to proactively and systematically reach every family at 5 universal mandated contacts during the period from pregnancy to five years, and to provide additional targeted support for specific needs where these are identified. Through these contacts, practitioners are well placed to identify families with limited English proficiency and to support their access to healthcare services. Effective

communication is fundamental to ensuring that parents understand both the signs and symptoms that should prompt urgent help-seeking and the mechanisms by which that help can be accessed.

The iHV agrees that for safety-netting advice to be effective, families must not only understand when emergency assistance should be sought but also have confidence in how to access emergency services, including awareness that interpreter services are available to support communication during a 999 call when required.

The iHV has consistently highlighted the importance of equitable access to services and culturally competent care for all families, including those who face language and communication barriers. We recognise that this issue is particularly important for vulnerable infants and children, where delays in seeking emergency care may have serious consequences.

The iHV also recognises the challenges posed by national health visiting workforce shortages. Sustained workforce pressures can reduce the time available during contacts for practitioners to undertake comprehensive assessments, explore families' understanding of health information, identify communication needs and reinforce key safety-netting messages at additional targeted contacts where these might be warranted. The iHV has repeatedly called for investment in the health visiting workforce to ensure that practitioners have sufficient capacity to provide personalised support to families with additional communication needs and to address health inequalities effectively.

Concern 2: *Using informal interpreters such as family and friends for primary care appointments can be a pragmatic solution when professional interpreters are not available. However, the practice carries a significant degree of risk as the informal interpreter may not convey information reliably. This can be mitigated in part if the healthcare professional is with the patient and able to form their own view of the patient's status based on the observations that can be made.*

iHV Response: The Institute of Health Visiting (iHV) recognises the Coroner's concern regarding the risks associated with the use of informal interpreters, including family members or friends, during healthcare encounters. The iHV supports the principle that wherever possible, professional interpreting services should be used when providing healthcare to individuals and families who are not able to communicate effectively in English. Accurate communication is fundamental to safe clinical assessment, effective decision-making, safeguarding, informed consent and the provision of appropriate advice to parents and carers.

The use of informal interpreters may create significant risks, including the potential for information to be omitted, misunderstood, modified or influenced by the interpreter's own beliefs, understanding or relationship with the parent/carer. Such risks may be particularly significant when discussing a child's health, symptoms of deterioration, or safety-netting advice regarding when and how to seek urgent medical assistance.

Direct observation of a baby or child, by a healthcare professional, forms an important component of any assessment. Where communication is mediated through an informal interpreter, there is an increased risk that the healthcare professional may not receive a complete or accurate account of symptoms, concerns or changes in condition. This may affect clinical decision-making and, in some circumstances, delay escalation of care.

Health visitors have a particularly important role in identifying communication needs during routine contacts and in supporting families to access healthcare services appropriately. Building trusting

relationships with families enables health visitors to better understand barriers to accessing care, including language barriers, health literacy and confidence in navigating healthcare systems.

In addition, longstanding health visiting workforce shortages need to be taken into consideration (with a loss of around 45% of the health visitor workforce in England since 2015); this has significantly reduced opportunities for practitioners to spend the time required to undertake comprehensive assessments, explore parental understanding, identify communication barriers, and reinforce key health and safety messages. The iHV has consistently highlighted the need for sufficient workforce capacity to ensure that families requiring additional support receive personalised, equitable and safe care.

Concern 3: *The use of informal interpreters in primary care settings can lead to patients and carers wrongly assuming that emergency assistance can only be accessed by someone who is able to speak English on their behalf. Where an informal interpreter is not with the patient, there is a substantial risk that they will not be able to give sufficiently accurate and/or up to date information to enable the Ambulance Service to reliably triage a call.*

iHV Response: The Institute of Health Visiting (iHV) acknowledges the Coroner's concern regarding the risk that families who routinely rely on informal interpreters may incorrectly believe that emergency healthcare can only be accessed when an English-speaking family member, friend or advocate is available to support communication.

As outlined in our response to Concern 2, the iHV recognises the risks associated with reliance on informal interpretation and the importance of professional language support wherever possible. This case highlights that individuals may delay or avoid seeking urgent medical assistance because they lack confidence in their ability to communicate directly with emergency services, or are not aware that interpretation support is available from these services. The iHV agrees that this represents an important patient safety issue.

As covered in our response to concerns 1 and 2, when adequately resourced, health visitors are often well-placed to identify families who may experience barriers related to language, health literacy or unfamiliarity with healthcare systems. Through their ongoing relationships with families, health visitors can play an important role in supporting parents' understanding of how and when to seek urgent care, including the availability of interpreters, whilst reinforcing key safety-netting advice appropriate to the child's needs.

Actions Already Undertaken - the iHV has already undertaken a range of activities that support the issues identified within this Prevention of Future Deaths Report:

- Delivered education and professional development opportunities on culturally competent and inclusive practice, reducing health inequalities and supporting families with diverse communication needs.
- Continually advocated for increased health visiting workforce capacity to enable health visitors to provide safe, effective and person-centred care.
- Promoted the use of professional interpreters where language barriers may affect assessment, communication, safeguarding or parental understanding.
- Worked in partnership with NHS Healthier Together to develop a range of web-based parent-facing resources on the management of childhood illnesses, including information on “when to worry and where to seek help”. These resources include clear Red, Amber, Green symptom guides designed to support parents and carers in recognising signs of deterioration and accessing appropriate services. The resources can be instantly translated into 39

commonly spoken languages and are signposted through the iHV website and routinely promoted through the Institute's work on childhood illness prevention and management.

Further Actions and Commitments - The iHV considers that the issues identified by the Coroner have relevance across health visiting services nationally. Ensuring that families can understand and act on safety-netting advice, regardless of language spoken, is an important component of patient safety, safeguarding and reducing health inequalities. The iHV will therefore seek to disseminate the learning from this report widely to support improvements in practice and awareness across the health visiting profession, through the following actions:

1. **Disseminate Learning from this Prevention of Future Deaths Report:**

Once the report is in the public domain, the iHV will disseminate learning arising from this report to its professional networks through its monthly newsletter, to raise awareness of:

- The impact of language barriers on patient safety and health outcomes.
- Good practice in the use of professional interpretation services.
- Potential barriers to accessing urgent and emergency care for families with limited English proficiency.
- The importance of effective safety-netting and health literacy - supporting parents' understanding of when and how to access urgent and emergency healthcare services and raising awareness of the availability of language support services for those who need them.
- Timescale: Once the report is in the public domain, we will include a feature in the next iHV monthly newsletter.

2. **Support Professional Development:**

The iHV will continue to promote learning and professional development opportunities that support health visitors to:

- Recognise and address health inequalities.
- Assess and respond to communication barriers.
- Deliver effective and culturally competent advice.
- Timescale: We have training on 'Promoting Care Across Cultures' – with dates for 2026/27 available.

3. **Review Professional Resources and Guidance:**

The iHV will review relevant educational materials, practice resources and professional guidance to ensure that they appropriately reflect:

- The importance of identifying and responding to language and communication needs.
- The risks associated with reliance on informal interpreters for clinical communication.
- The importance of ensuring families understand when and how to seek urgent and emergency care, raising awareness of the availability of language support services.
- Timescale: We are in the process of updating our resources to a digital format. During this process, the content on the points noted above will be strengthened in relevant resources where this is needed (this process will continue throughout 2026/27).

4. **National Advocacy:**

The iHV will continue its national advocacy work to promote equitable access to healthcare services for all children and families, including those who experience language and communication barriers. The iHV remains concerned that longstanding health visiting

workforce shortages continue to affect the capacity of services to provide the level of personalised support that some families require. Health visitors play a critical role in identifying communication needs, building trusting relationships with families, improving health literacy, supporting navigation of healthcare systems, and reinforcing safety-netting messages. These activities require sufficient time, continuity and professional capacity. The iHV will therefore continue to advocate for sustained investment in the health visiting workforce to ensure practitioners are able to deliver safe, effective and equitable care, particularly for families experiencing additional vulnerabilities or communication barriers

Monitoring and Governance

Progress against the actions outlined in this response will be monitored through the Institute's executive leadership arrangements. The Institute of Health Visiting is committed to supporting improvements that strengthen child health, safeguarding and health visiting practice.

We thank HM Coroner for highlighting these important issues and will continue to work with partners across the system to reduce the risk of similar tragedies occurring in the future.

Yours sincerely,

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CEO, Institute of Health Visiting